



## **History of NATO Veterans of Canada 2009 to 2015**

**- A personal history by Gord Jenkins 7 Jul 2018**

**The NATO Veterans Organization of Canada was started by Tom Joordens in Fredericton, New Brunswick around the year 2007. Originally Tom for the first year called the organization the “NATO and NORAD Veterans Organization”. After a year he realized that NORAD was a non-starter for number of people to join and dropped the NORAD in the title.**

**He enlisted local members and suggested they become “Life Members” for \$100. This way he could finance ordering NATO Vet badges, berets, mailing. Actually, Tom did everything himself from his office in his home - everything from application processing, purchasing NATO badges and pins, even a flag and office equipment and stationary. He did everything himself right down to packaging and mailing out the package at the local post office to new member**

**Tom passed away in 2008 shortly after his visit to Ottawa. He was having a routine hip replacement and passed away on the operating table. His 2 !C in Fredericton wife was in the hospital seriously ill and he was not in a position to take over. Neither were other members of his small board in F’ton.**

**After discussion with the new Ottawa Chapter Executive, the team decided to move all Toms office in his home to Ottawa and Ottawa would “ pick up the reins “nationally. The other established unit in zzzzz was not interested in taking on national responsibility’s. Toms wife now widow and son agreed that Toms work would and should be carried on and they boxed and sent by Acadia Bus Lines by express to Ottawa everything in Toms Office. There wer 4 trips to the Ottawa Bus station to pick up in total**

**8 boxes. The Ottawa Exec team never knew what to expect in the boxes when they arrived in Ottawa. Boxes could contain berets to badges to application forms to even a laminating machine for membership cards. No files as everything was in Toms head.**

**In 2009 all the existing files were transferred and sorted NATO Vet Unit # 3 Ottawa Gatineau assumed the additional role of “national HQ” . The HQ was kept in Ottawa & assumed the role of National Headquarters. The Ottawa Gatineau portion moved to Kemptville. It soon became apparent that the NATO Vets was not just NATO since most of the Canadian Forces, especially the Canadian air and ground elements, had at one time been employed in a NATO role. Additionally, many members had been involved in Peacekeeping missions while acting in secondary capacity as NATO reserves in Canada. From the very beginning NATO Vets represented navy, army and air force veterans from WW2/Korea/peacekeeping /Gulf /Afghanistan and other special duty areas.**

**The year 2010 was spent recruiting members of the executive and organizing the new Ottawa HQ. However, before this task was completed, the New Veterans Charter, which had been passed in 2006, began to raise its ugly head. It immediately became apparent that the New Veterans Charter (NVC) had some very serious flaws. The first task was to learn and receive training in the NVC. This was accomplished by assistance from a long established fellow veterans organization, ANAVETS, and by liaison visits to Veterans Affairs Headquarters in Charlottetown, by NVOCs Director of Advocacy.**

**As a result of these actions and an analysis of the New Veterans Charter, NVOC was able to put together a policy paper on the shortfalls of the NVC and our recommendations for improvements. The paper was issued to VAC on 3 Feb 2011 .**

**Not much happened so**

- **on 1 Oct 2011 our first letter from NVOC was issued to the Minister VAC focusing on one issue to start :Long Term Care ( in summary all the military hospitals were to be closed across Canada)**
- **6 Nov 2011 NVOC issued a Press Release “Response to Enhancements Needed in NVC’ On the same date NVOC published a Paper “*Plan on NVOC Advocacy - The Way Ahead*”**
- **2012 and 2013 NVOC wrote 4 letters to Minister of VAV/one to Minister of Finance/and a letter campaign where every sitting MP and Senator was written a letter of NVOC concerns with NVC. All the letters are available upon request with dates as well as responses.**

**The responses from the Ministers (in our brief 6 year existence NVOC has had three separate Ministers and the same number of VAC Deputy Ministers) were polite and prompt. However, it became apparent to NVOC and other moderate veteran organizations that nothing was going to be done “in immediate future” to address the missing parts of the New Veterans Charter. It also became increasingly apparent that the reason for the delay was that the Present Government was not willing to put money in the Budget to address these serious veterans issues.**

**On 14 November 2012 NVOC issued a Press Release “The Forgotten Generation of Veterans “This was a turning point as the House of Commons Standing Committee asked us on March 2014 to appear -along with other moderate veteran organizations. This happened again in June 2014.**

**At the same time the Office of the Ombudsman as well as the other moderate veterans groups were advocating with a more coordinated were consistent in advocating for same issues.**

### **Appearances before the Parliamentary Standing Committee**

NVOC were invited on four occasions to appear before the Standing Committee to present our position on the New Veterans Charter and other associated Veteran’s issues. On every occasion we presented our case and answered detailed questions on our position. Many of our recommendations appear in their report to Parliament.

### **Relationship With Veterans Affairs**

NVOC has always maintained the importance of good working relationships with the staff of VAC; good personal relationships enhance reasonable and productive discussions.

In June 2011 VAC decided to hold semi-annual meetings with Veterans organizations; these were termed Stakeholders Meetings. Unfortunately these meetings became a forum for VAC to tell the stakeholders what they were doing; there was no opportunity for Veteran’s Organizations to have input to the agenda. This resulted in some very heated exchanges over the years. It was not until the November 19<sup>th</sup> meeting at the Citadelle in Quebec City of the Stakeholders that the atmosphere began to improve. Many Veterans Organizations attributed this positive change to the new Deputy Minister, General (Ret’d) Walt Natzynczyk. This was the first time veterans had an input into the agenda and each stakeholder was given 5 minutes to state their concerns.

On April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015 the new minister of Veterans affairs, Erin O'Toole, himself a veteran, conducted a "Stakeholders Summit" at the Canadian War Museum. This was without doubt the most positive development to date.

### **Legion Hosted Veterans Consultation Assembly**

Also in 2011 the Headquarters of the Royal Canadian Legion began hosting Semi-annual meetings of veteran's organizations to discuss common problem areas. As with the Stakeholders meetings, 90 percent of the discussions focused on the shortcomings of the New Veterans Charter. In the past year the Veterans Consultation Assembly presented 15 recommendations to the Department of Veterans Affairs for inclusion in the amendments to the NVC. Unfortunately, the new Bill C-58 contains only portions of six of the 15 recommendations.

### **NATO VETERANS OF CANADA ORGANIZATION**

NATO Vets has an Executive and a series of functional Committees. In addition we have a body of Senior advisors as well as a Patron, General Paul Manson, former Chief of the defence Staff. All member of the Executive are well experienced in their specific fields and all are long serving members with a vast array of backgrounds in the military. All are extremely dedicated to assisting the entire body of the Canadian veterans' community.

### **CONCLUSION**

Although NATO Vets has existed in its present form and location for only six years, we have made tremendous strides in serving the Veterans' community. Our appearances before the Parliamentary Standing Committee, our contributions to the Stakeholders meetings and to the Veterans Consultation Assembly have all helped move the yard sticks to greater veterans benefits.

With our new and improved website and our improved recruiting program we are now able to reach and serve more members in a more efficient manner.

We must now strive to reach the newer generation of veterans, many who are in dire need of assistance and care.

### **STAKEHOLDERS MEETINGS**

**June 14, 2011,**

**Oct 24, 2011,**

**Feb 8/9 2012**

**March, 2013**

**Nov 19, 2014 - La Citadelle, PQ**

**Apr 14, 2015 - stakeholders Summit - Canadian War Museum**